

Congressional Leaders Warn Against HHS Efforts to Limit Health Care for Low-Income Children

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Finance Healthcare Subcommittee Chairman John D. Rockefeller, IV (D-WV), House Committee on Energy and Commerce Chairman John Dingell (D-MI), House Committee on Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee Chairman Frank J. Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), and House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA) expressed concern that the Department of Health and Human Services is endangering health coverage for low-income, uninsured American children...

NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

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CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS WARN AGAINST HHS EFFORTS TO LIMIT HEALTH CARE FOR LOW-INCOME CHILDREN

Baucus, Rockefeller, Dingell, Pallone, Waxman blast recent CMS actions restricting kids' coverage through Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program

Washington, DC — Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Finance Healthcare Subcommittee Chairman John D. Rockefeller, IV (D-WV), House Committee on Energy and Commerce Chairman John Dingell (D-MI), House Committee on Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee Chairman Frank J. Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), and House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA) expressed concern that the Department of Health and Human Services is endangering health coverage for low-income, uninsured American children with inappropriate changes to policies for Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). In a letter to HHS Secretary Michael Leavitt this week, congressional leaders blasted December 2007 action by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) that denied Ohio's request to extend health coverage to more children through Medicaid.

"CMS can't just make unilateral, under-the-radar changes that keep poor kids from getting the doctor's visits and medicines they need," said Baucus. "Congress made it clear in law that Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program should be there for lower-income kids living without insurance, and the changes made by CMS are threatening to kick children out of the doctor's office and back into the dangerous world of the uninsured."

"Medicaid is a vital safety net for hundreds of thousands of West Virginians, and millions of families across the nation. I'm not going to let CMS use extra-legal means to deny West Virginia's children or anyone else of modest means access to the federal guarantee of health care coverage," Rockefeller said. "CMS doesn't get to stack the deck through administrative fiat when they are unable to gain support in Congress for their misguided policies. Health care for our nation's children must be non-negotiable."

"With more than 46 million Americans without health insurance, State efforts to protect the health of more low-income citizens should be encouraged and supported. Instead, the Bush Administration is working to limit access to our nation's most successful and effective health care programs," said Dingell. "The restrictions the Administration is imposing - on both SCHIP and Medicaid - are harmful and will undoubtedly put the health of thousands of our most vulnerable children at unnecessary, indefensible risk."

"For six years, President Bush had no problem giving states the flexibility we all know they need to reach both children and families who do not have health insurance, but that all changed last year," Pallone said. "At a time when states are aggressively working to ensure that their most vulnerable populations have access to health coverage, the Bush administration should not be imposing harmful and unattainable conditions that make it impossible for states to reach more people."

"The Bush Administration has no authority to make this kind of decision," said Waxman. "Even by their standards, it is mean-spirited and really counterproductive. They simply can't decide that the federal government is no longer going to share in the cost of health care for low-income kids. That is the exact opposite of what Medicaid and SCHIP were designed to do."

The congressional leaders called the December 20, 2007 denial of Ohio's state plan amendment (SPA) an action that exceeds the statutory authority of CMS and one that, if pursued elsewhere, will result in millions of children living without health care. The decision springs from a Department of Health and Human Services directive issued on August 17, 2007 to limit states' efforts to cover many lower-income uninsured children on the premise that millions of these children could obtain private coverage. However, coverage offered to lower-income families may not be affordable, and may not offer comparable care.

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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